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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 JERUSALEM 000870

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TAGS: PREL KMDR KPAL KWBG KPAO IS

SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (06/01): CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM OVER U.S. ABILITY TO MOVE PEACE FORWARD

Main Stories:

All front pages report on "bloody confrontations" on May 31 between Palestinian Authority (PA) police and Hamas "militants" in Qualquilya northern West Bank. Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida lead with the story. Papers report that six police and 2 militants were killed and one innocent bystander. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas condemned the incident and highly praised the role of the PA police and security services in keeping the situation calm and strengthening the rule of law in the Palestinian Territories. PA Premier Fayyad expressed his sorrow over the confrontations, but also stressed that the, "PA won't apologize for the incident since it is our duty to enhance rule of law." Al-Ayyam runs separate front page coverage of Hamas reaction in Gaza, where Hamas leaders are reconsidering Hamas participation in future Palestinian unity talks, in light of the incident and, the "continued crimes against Hamas," according to coverage.

Al-Ayyam leads with and Al-Quds runs front page coverage on Israeli Premier Netanyahu's rejection of President Obama's request to halting all settlement activities and quotes him stating that there will be no freeze, despite requests by Obama and Secretary Clinton. Israeli officials are further quoted stating that, "the decision to halt settlement activities is unacceptable to the Government and the people of Israel."

All front pages report that Palestinian Authority President Abbas met with Jordan's King Abdullah on May 31 in Amman. The two leaders discussed efforts to re-launch peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and end the conflict based on the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative. Abbas briefed King Abdullah on his meetings with President Obama last week in Washington, during which Obama reiterated the need to halt all settlement activities,

according to coverage.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds run front page coverage citing the London-based Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper on, "sources in the Israeli right wing" revealing that prominent American and European political figures have promised to try to undermine the two-state solution by offering Palestinian refugees monetary compensation and an "alternate homeland" in Jordan, according to reporting.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida's front page cites AFP in reporting that Egypt hopes that President Obama's speech to the Muslim world on June 4, will present a, "serious rapprochement towards peace in the Middle East". Quoting an Egyptian Presidency spokesperson, reporting continued that Egypt considers the Palestinian-Israeli conflict a higher priority than even the "Iranian threat" and that no further delays or failures to end the conflict should be allowed, given U.S. and European support for a Middle East peace process.

Weekend Stories:

Sunday May 31:

Weekend papers carried extensive reporting on last week's meetings between President Obama and Palestinian Authority (PA)President Abbas. All front pages on May 31 led with Abbas' quotes highlighted in lead headlines, "We felt the Americans were serious about achieving peace: We told them to implement the Arab peace initiative and reiterated our opposition to any modification of that initiative." Speaking in a joint press conference with his Egyptian

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counterpart, Abbas again reiterated Palestinian demands for a halt to all settlement activities and Israel's acceptance of the two-state solution and noted that the Annapolis meetings were not "a waste of time" but could be useful in resolving final status issues.

In regards to a future PA unity government, Abbas noted that he told the Americans that all members of such a government would abide by PLO agreements. In separate reporting, all front pages also ran comments by Fatah leader Ahmad Quray welcoming U.S. policy regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and rejecting Israeli Premier Netanyahu's policies, stressing that Palestinian-Israeli negotiations have been "exhausted".

Well-informed American sources told London-based Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper that President Obama wants U.S. partners in the Middle East to take positive steps towards, "laying the foundation" for re-launching the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, according to Al Hayat Al Jadida's and Al Ayyam's front pages. The sources added that the U.S. will work as an "honest broker for peace" a role which has become more visible to the American public through constant U.S. pressure on Israel's Prime Minister to halt settlement activities. In related reporting, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page and Maan news agency reported that U.S. officials have promised to step up pressure on Israel to halt Palestinian home demolitions in Jerusalem and ensure their housing needs in exchange for certain steps. According to reporting, a senior Palestinian official revealed on May 29 the steps that Palestinian-Americans are helping put into play by asking Palestinians to temporarily refrain from building without Israeli permits and immediately seeking permits through Israeli legal channels by submitting zoning and construction plans to the Jerusalem Municipality.

Saturday, May 30:

Reporting on last week's meetings between President Obama and Palestinian Authority President Abbas led news. All front pages noted that Obama awaited official response from Israel to his request for a halt to settlement activities and acceptance of the two-state solution. Lead headlines also highlighted that 400 U.S. Congressmen have signed a letter calling upon President Obama to intensify his efforts for peace in the Middle East. In separate front page reporting, all dailies reported that Abbas gave Obama a document outlining the PA's plan for re-launching the peace process and resolving final status issues. Abbas told AFP that the plan "corresponded to" the Road Map and the Arab peace initiative. Al

Ayyam's front page ran optimistic quotes by PA Presidency spokesperson Abu Rudaynah noting that, "We heard a new and unified language in Washington and the coming weeks will witness active political movement."

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Regular columnist Samih Shbib opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title, "A Promising Start" (06/01): "President Obama's meeting with Abbas in Washington has been very positive; it was an open and honest talk. Obama reiterated his commitment to the two-state solution... The U.S. administration fully realizes that any progress in relations with the Muslim world won't be attained if the expansion of settlements continues... However, Israel has never felt any real pressure from all previous U.S. administrations, pressure that actually stops Israel from imposing facts on the ground ... We, as Palestinians, hope to see Obama's promising statements coupled with specific timeframes and real pressure to translate promises into action or else the Palestinian state will never be a reality."

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2) Hafith Barghouti opines in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida official daily under the title "Netanyahu" (06/01): "... Netanyahu will never be forced to halt settlement activities, since he is supported by all Israeli factions who endorse settlement expansion in one way or another... These factions don't believe in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state... I believe that halting settlements can't be achieved through agreements and understandings but through REVOLUTIONS."

WALLES